



Wildland/Urban Interface

Conflict Resolution

When driving through the Santa Monica Mountains, whether across the famed Mulholland Highway or through one of the canyon passes, such as Topanga or Malibu Canyons, it is evident that open space is shared with people. When wildland areas, such as valleys and hillsides are shared with urban structures, such as residences and businesses, they are known as a **wildland/urban interface**.

When fires occur near wildland/urban interfaces, National Park Service Fire Managers must put their efforts into protecting life and property first, before wildlands. Homes in an interface threaten wildlands. One home not properly protected can endanger an entire community. Also, in areas of wildland /urban interface, property owners sometimes oppose the use of prescribed fires. Prescribed fires reduce fuel buildup, while reducing the threat of a hotter, more damaging fire. People living in, or planning to build in, wildland/urban interface areas have a responsibility to their neighbors and the environment. They must follow certain precautions to ensure safety: choose a fire-safe location, design and build fire-resistant structures, and finally, practice fire-safe landscaping and maintenance.

Managing lands in and around wildland/urban interfaces is a challenge. When management issues or environmental problems arise, such as the use of prescribed burns, many "stakeholders" can influence the decisions, especially in the Santa Monica Mountains. **Stakeholders** are those people who have a direct or indirect interest in the area. When addressing management decisions with stakeholders, some guidelines for beginning to address and resolve conflicts are listed on the next page.



Wildland/Urban Interface

Look at the problems.

Ask "What is at risk?" Dealing with environmental problems usually involves the interaction of humans and the environment, and the threat or risk associated with that interaction.

Example: Fuel buildup that could result in highly damaging fire puts human lives and homes at risk.

Identify the issues.

This involves the problem or its solution, for which there may be differing beliefs and values. Usually this is when two or more parties disagree. The issue is in the form of a question: "Should... or...?"

Example: Should Land Managers do prescribed burns or allow dead chaparral to build up?

Identify all the stakeholders and their positions.

These are the individuals or groups involved and the positions on which they stand. Their positions are determined by the value or relative worth they place on something: aesthetic, ecological, economical, cultural, social, recreational, scientific, religious, political, etc.

Example: Native Plant Societies have an ecological interest in the land and support prescribed fires.

Address solutions.

Using all the above, begin to look at strategies to resolve the issues.